

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PEKING 01505 040949Z

21

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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FM USLO PEKING

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6130

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E.O.11652: N/A

TAGS: TPHY, PINT, CH

SUBJECT: EARTHQUAKE SITUATION UPDATE, AUGUST 4

REF: PEKING 1492

1. THE LATEST MESSAGE FROM THE MFA PROTOCOL DEPARTMENT DELIVERED AUGUST 4, STATES THAT TREMORS HAVE CONTINUED SINCE THE ORIGINAL EARTHQUAKE (JULY 28). IT GOES ON TO SAY: "IN PEKING, WE HAVE NOT DISCOVERED ANY FULL PREMONITORY INDICATION FOR TREMORS ABOVE MAGNITUDE SIX IN THE COMING DAYS. BUT THE POSSIBILITY STILL CANNOT BE EXCLUDED. IT IS STILL NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN VIGILANCE."

2. THIS IS THE FIRST INDICATION THAT CHINESE BELIEVE THE DANGER OF ANOTHER STRONG SHOCK IN THE PEKING AREA HAS LESSENED. WE EXPECT IT WILL BE AT LEAST ANOTHER WEEK, HOWEVER, BEFORE THERE IS ANY RELAXATION OF EARTHQUAKE PRECAUTIONS IN THE CITY. (THREE MILITARY-TYPE TENTS PROVIDED BY THE DIPLOMATIC SERVICES BUREAU NOW STAND--THUS FAR UNOCCUPIED--IN FRONT OF THE USLO RESIDENCE AND OFFICE BUILDING, AND MOST EMBASSY COMPOUNDS HAVE SPROUTED TENTS IN SIMILAR FASHION.)

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PAGE 02 PEKING 01505 040949Z

3. THERE ARE FURTHER SIGNS THE CHINESE WANT TO KEEP THE

NUMBER OF FOREIGNERS IN PEKING TO A MINIMUM. SOME FOREIGN STUDENTS NOW FROM PEKING NOW ON AN ORGANIZED TOUR OF THE NORTHWEST REPORTEDLY HAVE BEEN ADVISED THEY WILL GO AFTERWARDS TO NANNING IN SOUTH CHINA FOR A STAY OF UP TO TWO MONTHS. SOME FOREIGN EXPERTS EMPLOYED BY THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT IN PEKING ARE SOON TO GO TO WUHSI (NEAR SHANGHAI) FOR ABOUT A MONTH.

4. OVER THE PAST TWO/THREE DAYS, AND ESPECIALLY AT NIGHTTIME, UNIFORMED SECURITY FORCES (CHIEFLY PLA, ALSO SOME FROM THE PUBLIC SECURITY MINISTRY) HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE IN EVIDENCE THAN RIGHT AFTER THE QUAKE. AT THE SAME TIME, SOME FOREIGN OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT SIZEABLE NUMBERS OF PLA NORMALLY GARRISONED AROUND PEKING HAVE GONE TO THE TANGSHAN AREA TO CARRY ON RELIEF AND SECURITY WORK.

5. THE MAIN RAIL LINE BETWEEN PEKING AND THE NORTHEAST, VIA TIENTSIN, IS REPORTED STILL CUT. WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION OF INCREASED AIR TRAFFIC BETWEEN PEKING AND SHENYANG (APPARENTLY A PRINCIPLE CENTER FOR THE DISASTER RELIEF WORK). WE HEAR THE PEKING-SHENYANG AIR FARE HAS BEEN REDUCED UNTIL NORMAL PASSENGER TRAFFIC ON THE MAIN RAIL LINE CAN BE RESUMED.

6. THERE ARE RUMORS IN THE STREETS AND IN THE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY THAT MAO AND MANY OTHER TOP NATIONAL LEADERS LEFT PEKING SOON AFTER THE JULY 28 QUAKE. HOWEVER, THE MFA INFORMATION DEPARTMENT HAS DENIED AS "ENTIRELY GROUNDLESS" RUMORS OF MAO'S DEPARTURE (AND OF A DETERIORATION IN HIS HEALTH). TWO CHINESE OFFICIALS HINTED EARLIER, HOWEVER, TO A REUTERS CORRESPONDENT, THAT MAO MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN IN PEKING WHEN THE QUAKE OCCURRED. SOME DIPLOMATS SUGGEST THE ENHANCED USE OF THE PLA ON THE STREETS FOR SECURITY MAY REFLECT AS YET UNDISCLOSED POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS. COULD BE, BUT WE SUSPECT THE AUTHORITIES BASICALLY ARE BUILDING INTO SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS THE SAME KIND OF EXTRA MARGIN THAT IS SO EVIDENT IN OTHER ASPECTS OF THE POST-QUAKE PRECAUTIONS.

GATES

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